DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 137 212 SO 009 945

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TITLE Student Preferences for Social Studies Content and Methodology.
PUB DATE [77]
NOTE 10p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Comparative Analysis; *Curriculum; Junior High School Students; Research Methodology; Secondary Education; Senior High Schools; *Sex Differences; Social Science Research; *Social Studies; *Student Attitudes; Surveys; Tables (Data); *Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

This study investigated (1) whether girls express greater or lesser interest in certain social studies methodology and content than do boys, and (2) whether, in these areas, differences exist between junior and senior high school students. Conducted in Georgia in 1976, the study involved 391 students representing rural and suburban areas. On an 18-item rating scale, the students indicated their level of agreement with statements explaining why a person might enjoy social studies classes. Ten statements dealt with methodology and eight dealt with curriculum content. These included use of films or oral reports and emphasis on current events or money management. Two tables of data document the results. Girls on both levels expressed interest in the culturally-oriented areas of sociology and cultural geography. This may indicate that the culturally-oriented areas of social studies have less male bias than those dealing with military and political history or physical geography. Boys, especially on the junior high level, expressed greater liking for military and political history than did girls, although the difference diminishes as students mature. In general, junior high students seemed more favorable than senior high students toward social studies. This may be caused by the maturation process, the nature of the school's program, or a combination of reasons. (Author/AV)

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ED137212

APR 11 1977

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Student Preferences for Social Studies Content and Methodology

by

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Introduction

During the past decade there has been a great amount of emphasis to insure that the schools' curricular and extra-curricular activities become less biased toward the middle class white male. The social studies curriculum has been greatly affected by this movement. While there has been an inclusion of materials for racial and minority groups and for women in the social studies offerings, little research has been reported to establish the feelings and interest of these groups for the social studies offerings. Two studies; McTeer, Blanton, and Lee (1975) and McTeer (1975); reported that when compared with the academic offerings of mathematics, science, and English, boys expressed a greater interest in social studies than did girls. However, there is little or no research reported as to why boys may have a greater interest in social studies than do girls, nor is there research which indicates whether there is a sex bias indicated for different social studies areas or for different teaching methodology. In 1976 a study was conducted to give some possible indications as to whether girls express a greater or lesser interest in certain methodology and in certain content areas of the social studies than do boys. This study also investigated whether, in these areas, differences existed between junior high school students and senior high school students.

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Procedure

The students used for the subjects for the study were randomly selected from

social studies classes in the upper elementary grades (seventh and eighth and who will throughout this study be referred to as junior high school students) in Woodstock Elementary School in Cherokee County, Georgia, and from the ninth, tenth, and eleventh grades of Cherokee High School, Cherokee County, Georgia. Cherokee County is localed in northern Georgia. It is located on the northern fringe of the metropolitan area of Atlanta. Woodstock Elementary School had a student population of about 970 students in grades 1 - 8. Cherokee High School, having grades 9 - 12, had a student population of about 2,300 students. Since Cherokee County is located on the fringe of metropolitan Atlanta, students from the southern end of the county represent a somewhat suburbian population and the students from the northern end of the county represent a somewhat rural population. Two hundred and three students at Woodstock Elementary School and 188 students at Cherokee High School were used in the study. Of these students, there were ninty-six boys and 106 girls at Woodstock Elementary School and eighty-six boys and 102 girls at Cherokee High School.

Earlier an open ended questionnaire was given to the entire school population of the seventh and eighth grade students at Woodstock Elementary School and the ninth, tenth, and eleventh grade students at Cherokee High School. The students were asked to list their likes and dislikes about their social studies courses. From these responses, and from the review of the literature concerning the teaching of social studies, eighteen statements concerning methodology and content for the teaching of social studies were derived. This was the instrument which was used with the 391 students chosen at random at Woodstock Elementary School and Cherokee High School. The students were asked to respond with their level of agreement to the eighteen items on the survey. This response was made on a five-point scale with 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = no opinion, 4 = disagree, and 5 = strongly disagree. The eighteen items used were:

1. I like social studies because the classes are mostly lecture with note taking and very little discussion.

2. I like social studies because the classes are mostly discussion and have little lecture.

3. I like social studies because the classes consist mostly of independent and group projects.

4. I like the study of social studies because in history one mostly studies the wars and the lives of great men.

5. I like social studies because the classes have films and filmstrips.

6. I like the study of social studies because in history one learns about how people lived in the past and about their religion, literature, and art.

7. I like social studies because of the games and puzzles that are played in class.

8. I like the study of social studies because in geography one studies about the different areas, landforms, and climates of the world along with the study of maps including latitude and longitude.

9. I like the study of social studies because in geography one studies the people of the other countries, their culture and how the geography of their country affects their culture.

10. I like social studies when the textbook is interesting, informative, and readable.

11. I like the study of social studies because in economics one learns how to manage one's own money and sees how our society operates on the free enterprise system.

12. I like the study of social studies because one studies the different groups of people in our society and different lifestyles of these groups.

13. I like the study of social studies because in the study of government one studies the laws and the structure of local, state, and federal governments and how these laws and governments relate to the individual.

14. I like social studies' tests that are a combination of matching, multiple choice, short answer, and a small amount of discussion.

15. I like social studies tests that only consist of discussion questions.

16. I like social studies when the work is done in class and there is no homework.

17. I like social studies when the study of current events is emphasized in class.

18. I like social studies because oral reports are given in class.

Of these items, item 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 10, 14, 15, 16, and 18 dealt primarily with methodology and items 4, 6, 8, 9, 11. 12, 13, and 17 dealt primarily with curriculum content in the social studies.

Of the 391 subjects who responded to the questionnaire, three groups were identified to be compared in order to determine if there were differences in the agreement expressed with the items of the questionnaire. These groups were: (1) junior high students to be compared with senior high students, (2) junior high boys to be compared with junior high girls, and (3) senior high boys to be compared with senior high girls. Through the use of the chi square technique the responses of each of the groups being compared were analyzed for each of the eighteen statements of the instrument. Table I shows the pair-wise chi square values for each group in relationship to the statements concerning the teaching of social studies.

Insert Table I

Where significant differences were found between groups, through analyzing the data (number of each group expressing likes or dislikes) it was determined in which direction the differences lay, i.e., which group expressed a greater agreement with the statement. Table II gives the direction of agreement for these chi square values found to be significant at the .05 or .01 level.

Insert Table II

Results

From the data given in Table I and Table II, it may be seen that in significant differences related to sex, the following differences were found:

(1) Junior high boys expressed a like for military and political history to a greater degree than did junior high girls (Statement 4) while senior high girls expressed a like for cultural history to a greater degree than did senior high boys (Statement 6).

(2) Girls, on both the junior high level and the senior high level, expressed a like for cultural geography to a greater degree than did senior high boys (Statement 9).

Table I

Pairwise Chi Square Values of
Statements Concerning Social Studies

Statement	Pairwise Groups		
	J.H./S.H.	J.H. Boys/ J.H. Girls	S.H.Boys/ S.H. Girls
1	15.83**	3.17	1.29
2	11.23**	9.07	4.04
3	7.64	7.90	4.50
4	40.21**	14.73**	9.20
5	10.89*	9.46	1.61
6	13.65**	8.71	14.59**
7	37.29**	4.84	0.88
8	20.42**	1.06	6.90
9	13.87**	11.94*	13.88**
10	17.57**	3.87	3.38
11	11.39*	6.62	4.98
12	8.18	5.44	22.70**
13	1.05	10.66*	3.24
14	7.29	2.57	7.28
15	42.30**	3.18	14.45**
16	7.90	11.53*	7.29
17	2.50	3.92	8.79
18	34.03**	10.09	14.87**

* significant at the .05 level

** significant at the .01 level

Table II

Chi Square Values and Pairewise Direction of Significant Differences

Statement	Pairwise Comparison		
	J.H./S.H.	J.H. Boys/ J.H. Girls	S.H. Boys/ S.H. Girls
1	15.83 J.H.		
2	11.23 J.H.		
4	40.21 J.H.	14.73 Boys	
5	10.89 S.H.		
6	13.65 J.H.		14.59 Girls
7	37.29 J.H.		
8	20.42 J.H.		
9	13.87 J.H.	11.94 Girls	13.88 Girls
10	17.57 J.H.		
11	11.39 J.H.		
12			22.70 Girls
13		10.66 Girls	
15	42.30 J.H.		14.45 Boys
16		11.53 Boys	
18	34.03 J.H.	10.89 Boys	14.87 Boys

(3) Senior high girls expressed a like for people and lifestyles (sociology) to a greater degree than did senior high boys (Statement 12).

(4) Junior high girls expressed a like for government to a greater degree than did junior high boys (Statement 13).

(5) Senior high boys expressed a like for discussion question tests to a greater degree than did senior high girls (Statement 15)

(6) Junior high boys expressed a like for having no homework to a greater degree than did junior high girls (Statement 16).

(7) Boys, both on the junior high and senior high levels, expressed a like for oral reports to a greater degree than did girls.

In regard to differences found between junior high students and senior high students, the data shows that there were twelve statements where significant differences were found between these two groups. In eleven of these instances, junior high students saw the statement more favorable than did senior high students. In only one instance, Statement 5 dealing with films and filmstrips, did senior high students see the statement more favorable than did junior high students.

Discussion

The results of the study validate some theories that have been postulated as to why boys might have a greater interest in social studies than do girls. It has been theorized by McTeer (1976) that many of the social studies areas have been male oriented which would probably result in boys having more interest in these areas than do girls. Those areas of the social studies which are culturally oriented have less male bias than do those areas which deal with military and political history and physical geography. Girls expressed interest in the culturally oriented subject areas of sociology and cultural geography. Also boys, on the junior high level, expressed a greater like for military and political history than did girls. Many teachers have expressed the observation that seventh and eighth grade boys have

great interest in anything dealing with battles and blood. Perhaps this sex difference in relationship to military history declines as students mature. The data indicates this trend. The study does reinforce the idea that greater interest for the social studies could be created among girls if the social studies curriculum were more culturally oriented.

In regard to the differences found among junior high and senior high students, the results of the study show this to be in favor of the junior high students with the exception of the use of films and filmstrips. At Cherokee High School there is an excellent social studies-English team teaching approach which makes it possible for teachers to have students for a two-hour time block. In this situation good use of films, including a full-length commercial film each quarter, is integrated into the teaching procedures. This probably accounts for the senior high school students expressing a favorable attitude toward films. In those six statement were no significant differences were found at the .05 level, an examination was made of the data to determine whether junior high students expressed a more favorable attitude toward these statements than did senior high students. In all instances there was a more favorable expression, although not significant at the .05 level, given by the junior high students. Thus in seventeen of the eighteen statements junior high students saw the school's program and teaching techniques more favorable than did senior high students. This probably means that junior high students are more positive toward the school than are senior high students. Speculation may be made as to whether this is caused by the maturation process, the nature of the school's program, or a combination of reasons.

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